

Gifted Children

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Book Review (Celebrating Genius): The Genesis of Artistic Creativity, by Michael Fitzgerald (2005) and The Nature of Creative Development, by J. S. Feinstein (2006)

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Recommended Citation

Hewston, Ruth (2007) "Book Review (Celebrating Genius): The Genesis of Artistic Creativity, by Michael Fitzgerald (2005) and The Nature of Creative Development, by J. S. Feinstein (2006)," *Gifted Children*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/giftedchildren/vol1/iss2/6>

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The Genesis of Artistic Creativity: Asperger's Syndrome and the Arts (Book ref no: 8305)
By Michael Fitzgerald, (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2005)

Review by: Dr. Ruth Hewston, Research Fellow at the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, The University of Warwick.

This text poses the question 'What features of Asperger's Syndrome might foster artistic success?' Fitzgerald has already made significant contributions to the debate on autism and creativity and this new book from him is to be welcomed. It offers compelling insights into the association between creative genius and autism spectrum disorders – ranging from Arthur Conan Doyle's interest in cricket statistics and Ludwig van Beethoven's inappropriate proposals of marriage to Andy Warhol's obsessions with work, publicity, and his health.

The book's subdivision into parts discusses the creative talents of genius ranging across music, painting, literature, poetry and philosophy. The text covers the recognised criteria for diagnosis of high-functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome (AS). However, it is written in an uncomplicated and well explained manner, assuming the reader has only a moderate level of understanding of AS.

Fitzgerald brings together a number of individuals in whom genius and AS coincided, including George Orwell, Immanuel Kant, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Vincent van Gogh. Although the author acknowledges the partial need for an

artistically creative environment in order for these talents to be expressed, this book does present a comprehensive argument concerning the association between AS and creativity.

Fitzgerald writes clearly for the layperson. His writing takes a psycho-historical approach by documenting the life history and family background of persons with artistic genius and AS. The text could be criticised for linking, and indeed the diagnosis of such individuals after their death. However, Fitzgerald presents a comprehensive wealth of biographical and autobiographical information about their lives. His work broadly references and describes indicators of AS including social behaviour, language, humour, and obsessive interests and routines. With these criteria in mind, in reading accounts of their lives Fitzgerald proposes that these individuals behaved like persons with autism. Despite Fitzgerald's conclusions being rather limited, the text will provide the reader with a greater understanding of AS and creative genius. This is an affordable and highly recommended read. ♦

The Nature of Creative Development
By J.S. Feinstein, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006

Review by: Dr. Ruth Hewston, Research Fellow at the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, The University of Warwick.

Feinstein presents a comprehensive discussion concerning the basic concept of creativity and the patterns of development for individuals engaged in creative endeavour. This text is clearly the fruit of many years of questioning in the field and demonstrates a well grounded empirical basis to the author's line of enquiry.

The core of creative development consists of three elements, and this text adopts this same structure: the formation of creative interests; the process, exploration and development of the interest creatively; and the defining and execution of projects rooted in this interest and growing out of its development. The book is filled with case study material of individuals who have achieved across a wide range of creative fields. Individuals famous in the arts and social sciences, technology and business include Virginia Woolf, Thomas Edison, Charles Darwin, and Piet Mondrian. This rich contextualised information is integrated with the creative development of contemporary individuals interviewed by the author.

The author himself acknowledges that some may see his text as too sweeping and an attempt to seek a false generality regarding the development of creativity. However, I consider the text to be an important step in attempting to understand individual differences in the creative process. Feinstein adopts a theoretical framework which integrates both rich case study detail regarding the individual and the wider cultural and environmental place of these individuals in society. The text is highly affordable and a recommended read for any professional interested in the field. ♦